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ABSTRACT

This booklet is one of a series of reports addressing the most critical issues confronting state boards of education throughout the United States. Each report attempts to present a concise, informative review and analysis of the best and most current information available on one of these critical topics. This booklet focuses on ways to increase the policy-making effectiveness of state boards of education. Section 1 contains a brief overview and summary of the booklet; section 2 presents a review and analysis of the policy-making functions of state boards by David L. Colton; section 3 presents a number of action alternatives recommended by the staff of the National Association of State Boards of Education; and section 4 contains footnotes and a brief annotated bibliography prepared by the author of section 2. (Author/JG)

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THE IMPERATIVE OF LEADERSHIP

Volume II, Number 3

A REPORT ON DEVELOPING BOARD AGENDAS THAT FOCUS ON POLICY

NASBE

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This report represents Volume II, No. 3 in NASBE's *Imperative of Leadership* series, made available with funds provided by ESEA, P.L. 89-10, Title V, Section 505 through the State of New York. Volume I contained the following reports sent free-of-charge to all NASBE members: *Educational Governance* (No. 1); *Reforming School Finance* (No. 2); *Strengthening and Improving Relationships Between State Boards of Education and Legislators* (No. 3); *Accountability and Assessment* (No. 4); *The Education of Disadvantaged and Minority Children: A Multicultural Perspective* (No. 5); *The Planning, Improvement and Governance of Vocational and Vocational-Technical Education* (No. 6).

Volume II contains to date: *Declining Enrollments* (No. 1); and *Developing Effective and Visible State Boards of Education* (No. 2).

Volume II, No. 1, on *Declining Enrollments* is being published with funds provided by the National Institute of Education (NIE). Volume II, No. 8, on Preventive Health Education will be funded by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Center for Disease Control, Atlanta, Georgia.

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PREFACE

This report on *Developing Board Agendas That Focus on Policy* is third in a second volume of reports on timely issues of concern to State Boards of Education. Publication of these *Imperative of Leadership* reports is made available to all NASBE members with funds provided by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA, Public Law 89-10, Title V, Section 505), through the State of New York. The first report in this volume, on *Declining Enrollments*, was published with funds provided by the National Institute of Education (NIE).

Other reports on the following topics are being published in this series of issue packages:

- **Developing Effective and Visible State Boards of Education**
- **Career Education**
- **Community Education**
- **Alternative Methods of Teacher Education**
- **Developing Consistent and Cooperative Constituency Linkages**

An eighth report on ***Preventive Health Education*** will be published early next year, and is being funded through the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Center for Disease Control, Atlanta, Georgia.

The report that follows is organized into four sections. Section I presents a condensed *Overview Summary* of the research text contained in Section II. Section III, the *Action Alternatives*, contains recommendations developed by the NASBE staff. Section IV is an *Appendix*, consisting of Footnotes and an Annotated Bibliography.

NASBE wishes to express its appreciation to Dr. David L. Colton, Director of the Center for Educational Field Studies at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, who wrote the research text.

James M. Connor
NASBE President

September 1976
Denver, Colorado

SECTION I

Overview Summary

The direction of state level educational policy making has suffered because of the conflicting and increasing spheres of influence of "self-appointed task forces and commissions," governors and legislatures, state departments of education and other education and governance groups.

As an initial test in determining if your State Board is fulfilling its legally mandated policy making functions, check the Minutes of your Board's last few meetings. Are they dominated by routine items like reports and information? Are business items habitually passed, rejected or tabled with little or no discussion?

"Functionally, a policy item is any item that guides subsequent actions by others," according to Dr. Colton, who identifies four constraints to a Board's achieving a policy focused agenda:

- **The "Apex Myth" which portrays the State Board at the pinnacle of educational policy making in a state.** Rather than harboring this notion, the author suggests that Board members realize their role in some or all of these four stages of policy formation: *issue definition, proposal formulation, support mobilization and decision enactment.*
- **The "Inefficacy Myth"—a traditional image of powerlessness of State Boards.** To counteract, use your annual report to inspire, suggest and persuade. Develop a public relations scheme to enhance your position among other participants in the policy making role, and among the public at large.
- **Statutory Constraints—Do they interfere with your policy responsibilities by burdening your Board with important, but time-consuming routine mandates?** Appoint a committee to study your state's statutes to see if they help or hinder.
- **Political Isolation—Consider what educational policy *ought* to be,** and be attuned to the expectations and demands of the public.
- **Conditions of Board Membership—Since Board membership changes, it's possible to discuss issues on their merits, unhindered by personalities and the like.** Be prepared to initiate new members: develop your own orientation program and take advantage of the boardmanship assistance offered by NASBE. Be mindful of the importance of good Board Minutes.

Metapolicy—Policies About Policies

Once you have allotted time to deal with educational policy items, you must then be sure you are dealing with them in a productive and effective fashion. These five aspects of metapolicy can help:

- **GOAL IDENTIFICATION**—Your selection criteria might include your Board's officially established goals; "authority," such as policy statements of the U.S. Office of Education or your state's commissioner of education; planning and evaluation reports; and opinion polling.
- **SCHEDULING**—Develop one- and four-year calendars around such things as your legislature's and Congress' timetables, election campaigns, significant conferences and the like.

• **STAFF WORK**—State Board functions, like gathering and distributing information, briefing new members, preparation of Minutes, and the like, require time—and that is time taken away from policy items. Staff members directly responsible to the Board would help alleviate this burden.

• **INCREMENTALISM**—Avoid "analysis paralysis" by developing policy *one step at a time*. Don't wait to act until you have all the information on a topic.

• **AGENDA BUILDING**—At each Board meeting, review your agenda and reconsider it if need be. Be flexible in allowing changes.

To make certain that your identified policy items will receive the attention they deserve will require discipline by the Board. As an assist, remember the following:

- **Beware of Parkinson's Law that "work expands to fill the time available for its completion."**
- **Meet in a physical environment that facilitates policy making.**
- **Adopt and adhere to rules of procedure.**
- **Insist on good staff work.**
- **Assess your work periodically.** □

SECTION II

Developing Board Agendas That Focus on Policy

By David L. Colton, Director
Center for Educational Field Studies
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As things now stand educational policy flaps in the wind. And the direction of the prevailing wind continually changes as one and then another blast overpowers gusts continually swirling about from various quarters, each with its own source of power and money, its own base of operations, its own commitments. . . . Conflicting interests are the lifeblood of democratic politics, so their existence in education is not the problem. The problem is that no institutional mechanism exists to modulate the shifting balance of power among these interests into a reasonably consistent and cumulatively self-correcting policy.[1]

Until recently the institutional mechanisms that established fundamental educational policies were local school boards, prestigious national groups like the Educational Policies Commission (now defunct), and prominent individuals such as Horace Mann, John Dewey, George Strayer and James Conant. But today's local boards of education increasingly are dominated by their own chief executives.[2] Moreover, they are confronted by many issues such as financial reform and teacher bargaining which are not amenable to local solutions.[3] Elite national commissions and individuals have lost their credibility in a society permeated by skepticism and dashed hopes.

Many solutions are being advocated. Some people argue for the establishment of a national school board. Local school boards, individually and through their state and national associations, demand restoration of their pre-eminence in policy determination. Teacher associations, through direct political action and through bargaining at the local level, constantly broaden their spheres of influence. Self-appointed task forces and commissions set forth agendas for American education. Governors and legislatures strengthen their policy making capabilities at the state level, and work collaboratively through such organizations as the Education Commission of the States in Denver, Colo. Meanwhile, Congress, the courts, federal agencies and pressure groups churn out new policies, new rules and new demands. No wonder educational policy "flaps in the wind"!

Should State Boards of Education try to provide coherence and direction to our educational policies? Can they? Given their legal mandates and their strategic positions, they should. But it remains to be seen whether they can. Data from the recent Educational Governance Project Study of ten state school boards "point unmistakably to the weakness of state boards of education as policy-making participants."[4] Anyone reading a sampling of Minutes from State Board meetings probably would reach a similar conclusion. The Minutes indicate that routine items dominate the Board meetings: reports are received, information

and complaints are presented, ceremonial functions are performed. Recommendations for budget approvals and personnel appointments are adopted with little discussion. Policy oriented material is minimal. There are exceptions of course. But their very exceptionality raises doubts about the State Boards' policy making capabilities. Read the Minutes of *your* Board for the last year or two. Has your Board systematically addressed the major policy issues confronting education in your state? Has it taken effective actions designed to bring about resolution of these issues? If so, read no further. If not, consider the possibility that the situation can be remedied, and read on. In the Educational Governance Project Study, *the best indicator of school board influence was the extent to which Board meetings emphasized policy matters.*[5] There are ways to increase such emphasis.

THE NATURE OF AGENDAS AND THE NATURE OF POLICY

An agenda should not be viewed merely as a list of items that a Board "goes through" at its meetings. Properly considered, an agenda is like a budget. It allocates valuable resources—the time and talents of school board members. The following pages suggest approaches to the task of increasing the proportion of the agenda which is allocated to policy matters.

Defining 'Policy'

A preliminary step is to set aside the notion that policy matters are only those items which are intended to appear in State Board policy manuals. Functionally, a policy item is any item that guides subsequent actions by others. Thus if a Board provides input to the Governor's annual Message to the Legislature, it is engaged in policy making. Adoption of a Board resolution expressing support or opposition about a policy recommendation made by some other organization is a policy item. A decision to intervene in a judicial proceeding affects policy. Under some circumstances an ostensibly routine agenda item can become a policy item. For example, a New England school board recently chose to include in its Minutes the text of a letter it sent to a local district which had protested its failure to be awarded some funds. The letter set forth in detail the reasons why the State Board had declined to make the award. That letter surely will not appear in any state policy manual, but just as surely it will serve as a guide to action by local school districts. In the same fashion, another State Board's refusal to waive certification requirements for the benefit of a district facing a strike was a policy action, for it set a precedent.

While it is important to recognize that policy matters can take many forms, such recognition does not solve the problem of finding ways to develop agendas that allocate more time to policy matters. Solution to that problem requires three types of action.

- **First, the constraints** that limit a Board's attention to policy items must be identified, and techniques for minimizing or overcoming these constraints must be developed.
- **Second, policies** must be developed for ensuring productive use of the time allocated to policy items.
- **Third, there must be procedures** for assuring continuation of a policy focus.

CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Many conditions inhibit the attainment of a policy focus in State Board agendas. Among these conditions, the following appear to be particularly important: the "apex" myth, the tradition of inefficacy, statutory constraints, political isolation, and the conditions of Board membership. The policy-inhibiting effects of these conditions can be minimized, and in some cases they can be converted into assets.

The "Apex" Myth

This myth, which is manifested in organization charts, legal doctrine and inspirational rhetoric, depicts the State Board at the apex of the state's educational policy formation system. In reality however, governors, state legislatures, the courts, Congress, federal executive agencies, and a host of special interest groups are actively involved in the educational policy formation process. There is no apex. One response to recognition of the gap between myth and reality is to adopt a "spheres of influence" posture whereby the state school board restricts its attention to those policy matters that happen to fall its way, leaving other policy matters to other actors. But this posture aggravates, rather than ameliorates, the "flapping in the wind" problem cited earlier.

An alternate response rests upon understanding that policy formation occurs in several stages. Professors Roald Campbell and Tim Mazzoni identify four:

- **Issue definition: Process by which the preferences of individuals and groups become translated into political issues.**
- **Proposal formulation: Process by which issues are developed as specific recommendations for a policy change or for maintaining the *status quo*.**
- **Support mobilization: Process by which individuals and groups are activated to support or to oppose alternative policy proposals.**
- **Decision enactment: Process by which an authoritative (i.e. governmental) policy choice is made among alternative proposals.**[6]

The facts of life of educational policy making are such that State Boards often do not, cannot and need not dominate the policy making process at all four stages. However, by exerting influence at just one or two stages, the Board can have a profound effect upon policy.

The complexity of the policy making process permits the Board to exercise *leverage* —provided its agendas direct attention to educational policy making activities being conducted by others. To accomplish this, a Board's agenda should allot time for receipt and consideration of "intelligence reports" about the policy focused activities of actors in other educational policy making arenas. For example, the "Washington Report" section of NASBE's newsletter, FOCUS, includes items that may prompt a State Board to contact its congressional delegation, or to respond in some fashion to a proposed federal regulation. Individual Board members, as well as state education agency staffers, should brief the Board about happenings that may be germane to policy.

These intelligence activities have two main purposes. First, they identify opportunities for the Board to exert leverage upon the policy making activities of other actors. For example, if the Governor is scheduled to make a major address, the Board can tell the Governor about its concerns and plans, thereby engaging in "issue definition" and "proposal formulation" activities. Where the courts define an issue, the Board can step forward with proposed solutions, as the New Jersey Board did during the course of that state's recent school finance litigation.

and as the Missouri Board did last year in connection with desegregation litigation. Where another agency is moving toward the decision enactment stage, expressions of support or opposition from the State Board of Education may provide the margin of difference in the outcome of the action.

The second main purpose of intelligence activities is to learn from the experience of others. One of the great virtues of our federal system of government is that studies and policy actions in one state can lead to informed related actions in other states, thus saving energy and providing occasions for learning from experience. A problem is that too many states think they are completely unique and cannot profit from the experience of others. Some states have not yet become aware of the tremendous information-sharing potential of data retrieval systems such as the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), where policy background papers prepared in one state can readily be retrieved to help another state dealing with a related problem. Education newsletters and conferences can serve the same purpose.

What all of this means is that the apex image should be replaced by one which depicts the State Board as a kind of "traffic controller" in the educational policy making system: identifying events here, making connections there, shunting aside energies elsewhere, initiating patterns in still another place. Influence does not depend as much upon position in a power pyramid as it depends on information and the uses to which it is put.

The "Inefficacy" Myth

A curious anomoly of State Boards of Education is that the apex myth coexists with a traditional image of powerlessness and inconsequentiality. For decades State Boards have been expected to play insignificant roles in the educational policy formation process, and they have done so. The image must be changed—in the eyes of school board members themselves, in the eyes of other educational policy makers, and in the eyes of the public at large. There are many techniques for doing this. The leverage techniques discussed above will help. Board members can seek out educational newsletters and other materials that feature and explain policy achievements of individual states. Annual reports need not be drab statistics-laden exemplars of dullness; instead they can be used to stimulate and inspire, persuade and suggest, in the manner of Horace Mann's famous and influential annual reports.[7] Most state school boards fail to utilize even the simplest public relations and public information techniques.

This is not to say that "image" is a defensible substitute for accomplishment; the point is that accomplishments need to be stressed and reinforced so that State Boards come to see themselves, and to be seen by others, as efficacious policy making bodies.

Statutory Constraints

Statutes often severely inhibit the achievement of a policy focus on State Board agendas. For example, in Colorado, a new law provides that the "State Board of Education hires the state director of the bilingual-bicultural unit, hears appeals from districts whose plans have been rejected and adopts a timetable and standards for unit approval of plans. The board also sets a maximum student-teacher ratio."[8] Obviously these are important functions. But it also is clear that their performance, in anything other than a perfunctory manner, will consume sizeable chunks of the State Board's meeting time. Such legislation is very common. Statutory provisions of this sort should be vigorously protested.

State school boards should appoint commissions to investigate the extent to which mandated routine items preempt Board resources, and to propose alternative mechanisms for performing necessary routine tasks. Such commissions also

should consider techniques for forcing policy items onto State Board agendas. For example, state legislatures could take a cure from Congress by adopting programs that automatically expire after a few years unless there is a State Board recommendation for continuation or modification of the program. In this fashion legislatures can be encouraged to enhance, rather than inhibit, the policy emphasis of State Board agendas.

Political Isolation

Political scientists often belabor school boards for their "political isolation." But that is not really the problem. Indeed, anyone who has watched the educational policy formation process in Washington, D.C. quickly perceives that immersion in partisan politics is a principal cause for the "educational policy-flapping" which we now endure.[9] Educational policy makers must be alert to the demands and expectations of citizens, and they must recognize that much educational policy has to find its way through the partisan portions of our governmental system. But educational policy need not be initiated there.

The state school board is one agency that can consider what educational policy *ought* to be—a privilege and opportunity rarely afforded the people who are immersed in the business of generating and disbursing public funds. The great commissions and individuals who set educational goals in the past usually were not legislators and chief executives.

Conditions Of Board Membership

The general principles of effective boardmanship have been spelled out in many manuals and need not be discussed here.[10] However, some features peculiar to State Boards of Education warrant mention. First, diversity of background and the ever changing membership of the Board make it difficult to attain the "club" atmosphere that often facilitates real give and take on policy matters. However, by sheer will power (coupled with some skill in conflict management by the chairman or some other Board member) it should be possible to convert this problem into an asset: issues can be confronted on their merits, without fear of stepping on the toes of friends, or of wrecking back-home alliances and expectations. A second feature unique to State Boards is that these Boards are saturated with legal mandates. Unless a new Board member can be given expert assistance in mastering the nature and significance of these legal prescriptions, he/she will tend to give them excessive time and attention, with the result that the priority accorded policy matters will be diminished. The new member training sessions recently organized by NASBE, plus within-state orientation sessions, should be musts for new board members if policy matters are to become important objects of attention.

Third, because state school board sessions are short and widely spaced, most policy matters cannot be fully resolved at a single meeting. Hence, good Minutes are crucial. They must convey more than the mere fact that a policy item was discussed. Ideally they will be artfully constructed to display the issues raised, the positions taken, the progress made and the tasks remaining undone.

Another problem for state school board members is their unquestioning adoption of a classic principle of corporate governance: Boards make policy and chief executive officers implement it. In my opinion, policy making is a *legislative* kind of function, and the performance of that function should not be dependent upon the support or assistance of the executive agency chief. There is evidence that chief executives do not always function as facilitators of the policy making process; other duties or concerns occasionally place Boards in a position of dependency.[11] The result has been some loss of policy making ability by

Boards and legislatures. Today, both legislatures and corporations are considering the idea that policy making bodies should have their own staffs.[12] State Boards also may have to employ their own staffs if they are to attain a policy focus. Perhaps the reasons will become clearer as we turn to a discussion of policies for policy making.

STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING AGENDAS WITH A POLICY FOCUS

It is not enough merely to limit the obstacles that inhibit a State Board's efforts to allot more of its time and talent to agenda items that concern policy. Unless policy items are managed in a productive fashion, Boards soon will revert to their traditional emphasis upon routine items. But it is very difficult to manage policy items in a productive fashion, for they are inherently complex, uncertain and controversial. Research in *metapolicy*—policies about policy making—suggests approaches that can help Boards deal productively with policy items. Most of these approaches are primitive and unvalidated, but they can be tried out, refined and adapted to the unique circumstances of each Board. Five aspects of metapolicy will be discussed here: goal identification, scheduling, staff work, incrementalism and agenda building.

Goal Identification

The number of policy items that potentially could appear on a Board's agenda far exceeds the resources available for their consideration. *How then, can a Board select those policy items that should be included on its agenda, and those that should not?* The principal selection criterion should be the Board's officially established goals. If a State Board has developed a statement of its own major goals, it has a useable and reasonable device for selecting policy items for inclusion and exclusion on its agenda. Each year a state school board should schedule for itself at least one major session at which it adopts goal statements for the forthcoming year, as well as a more tentative set for the coming four-five year period.

There are a number of devices that can be used to identify and select goals. One is to rely upon "authority." For example, speaking at the 1974 NASBE Annual Convention, the then U.S. Commissioner of Education Terrel H. Bell set forth "the five most critical problems and performance gaps upon which your activism should focus. . .: 1. School finance equity, 2. School district organization and boundaries, 3. Collective bargaining in education, 4. Education of handicapped children, and 5. Performance accountability in education."[13] Although the Commissioner did not explain why he chose these goals rather than some others, it is probable that his selection was made judiciously, and that it constituted a reasonable set of goals—perhaps with some rearrangements and minor deletions or additions—for a State Board of Education. Your own state commissioner probably has (and definitely *should* have) his/her own list of top priority goals, and of course they too should be made explicit, and explicitly considered by the Board.

There are other sources of "authority" to which a State Board may turn in its efforts to identify and select goals. Not the least of these are the annual resolutions and/or platforms regularly adopted by some education organizations. While such sources of goals statements should be viewed with skepticism, they frequently incorporate significant ideas and proposals that warrant consideration by state school boards. In addition, there are occasional national commissions which provide sources of goals statements. For example, several such commissions recently have been reviewing and making proposals about secondary education.[14] Obviously it would be irresponsible for a State Board to routinely adopt

the goals and priorities of outside authorities. However, the outside authorities can provide very helpful formulations of goals, and from them the Board can make its own selection, based on its own considered judgments about the conditions, the needs and the opportunities confronting public education in a particular state. The exercise of such judgment constitutes the basic rationale for having state school boards.

A more expensive device for discerning and selecting goals is to create a citizens' commission or task force specifically charged to study the state's educational enterprise and to make recommendations for its improvement. The Fleischmann Commission in New York State was a monumental effort of this sort.[15] Many such commissions have been formed and have reported their conclusions and recommendations. Often these reports fail to have much impact, not because their substance is ill considered or impractical, but because the State Board of Education simply does not provide itself with adequate opportunities for doing more than "receiving" such reports.

An emerging source of goals is the field of assessment and evaluation.[16] Although this field has scarcely progressed beyond its infancy and hence provides little direct guidance in identifying goals for a State Board, it is a field with much promise and state school boards should encourage its development. One way to do so is to invite the assessors and evaluators to State Board goal selection sessions, and to solicit recommendations and advice. By providing a "market" for the recommendations of the assessors, state school boards will encourage the generation of responsible and useful advice.

Planning, like assessment, remains a primitive and underdeveloped tool for goal setting. Nonetheless, State Boards can solicit input from planners, and by doing so, can encourage the planners to begin generating more useful and more responsible information to the goal setting process.

Opinion polling has become a highly developed process in this nation. The Annual Gallup Education polls provide a basis for identifying and selecting goals. Although the pollsters tend to register opinion in a manner not directly translatable into goals, nonetheless the polls provide an important gauge of the perceptions of the population. These perceptions, in turn, provide guidance to goal-setters.

Obviously there are problems with all of the available aids to goal identification and selection. True believers, political partisans, media events, special interests, ignorance, traditionalism and other factors can all provide false leads. Yet goal setting is indispensable. A Board always should have a set of top goals—perhaps one-half dozen—and should use these as criteria for selecting policy items on its agendas.

Scheduling

Scheduling is simply the process of planning the state school board calendar in advance, in a manner designed to foster productive disposition of policy focused agenda items. Both single-year and four-or five-year calendars should be developed. Effective scheduling must take into consideration a variety of factors: the calendars of state legislatures and state and national conferences, developments in the courts, activities of pertinent commissions and capabilities of state education agency staffs. The activities of such groups help determine the most useful time to take up the various goals which the State Board has selected for its consideration. As was noted earlier, the policy making process has many phases. Thus if the State Board is to make the most effective use of leverage, and if it is to attain the highest possible degree of influence over other participants in the policy making process, it must schedule its own calendar in terms of the activities of other actors.

Agenda Building

Despite the laws of nature and man, society remains somewhat disorderly and unpredictable. Even the best of scheduling will be disrupted by some unexpected event. And even the most diligent staff members will not always produce the right information at the right time. For these reasons, a State Board must always be receptive to changing its agenda at the last minute—substituting one policy item for another; extending consideration of one item at the expense of another; stopping the whole proceeding in order to review Board goal statements; and so on. A Board that slavishly adheres to a predetermined agenda, no matter how carefully drawn, assumes the existence of a world more orderly than it really is. Thus, at each Board meeting, an early item of business should be a final review and reconsideration of the agenda itself.

Staff Work

Much of the preceding material assumes that State Board members have access to staff persons who have both the skills and the commitment to facilitate the Board's efforts to build policy focused agendas. For example, we have suggested the need for "intelligence" gathering and interpretation, the institution of a Board public relations program, studies of statutory constraints upon Board agendas, procedures for briefing new members, preparation of Minutes to accommodate the intermittent scheduling of Board meetings, collection of input for goal identification and selection sessions, and collection of information necessary for effective scheduling of policy items.

Beyond all of these chores there is the obvious one of assembling and distributing the background papers, alternatives for consideration, and recommendations for action which are essential for productive consideration of specific policy items.

Board members themselves can hardly be expected to perform all these tasks. In principle, of course, these tasks are the responsibility of the chief state school officer. However, based on past performance of local and state school boards, the national government and corporate boards, there are some reasons to believe that the chief executive officer may not be able to provide all of the necessary assistance. Thus a principle recommendation here is that State Boards of Education should employ staff members directly responsible to the Board and specifically responsible for performing those tasks essential for the productive use of time allocated to policy matters.

Incrementalism

In a nation born in the Age of Reason, and propelled to world leadership by the efforts of science and technology, it hardly is surprising that we tend to idealize the policy making process in terms of reason and formula: define the problem, identify the array of alternatives available for its solution, assess each alternative in terms of its costs and consequences, and then select the one best solution. Now there is nothing wrong with striving for such an ideal. But single-minded pursuit of it can lead to "analysis paralysis"—an inability to act because of an unmanageable complexity that often accompanies full rationality. Students of organizational decision making have discovered that decision makers usually look for "satisfactory" solutions rather than "optimal" ones.[17] Policy is developed incrementally—one step at a time. Opportunity and necessity present occasions for policy making, and such occasions demand responses, even if the full panoply of problem solving techniques cannot be followed. The usual result is that the policy decision turns out to be only partially adequate to the initial problem, and that unanticipated consequences materialize. But the proper re-

sponse here is to *expect* such consequences, to monitor the implementation system in ways which will identify them, and to keep the policy making system open to making adjustments and improvements in the initial policy decision.

In short, we are advocating a policy making policy that is incremental rather than rationally complete. The danger in this is that the Board will fall back on mere reaction or opportunism. There is a middle ground that is neither excessively complex nor excessively simplistic. The presence of long range goals, discussed above, is one device for ensuring that incremental policies tend to move in a predetermined direction, rather than merely "flapping in the wind."

There is an additional advantage to incrementalism. Occasionally a State Board will adopt a bold new policy, the implementation of which wreaks havoc upon the schools. Our schools and our school personnel simply are not equipped to make massive or sudden changes in their practices and policies. Incremental changes are far more easily accommodated, and in the long run they are more likely to be accepted.

IMPLEMENTING AN AGENDA THAT FOCUSES ON POLICY

Even if a State Board succeeds in overcoming the obstacles to providing policy focused agendas, and even if those agendas are supported by goal statements, scheduling and staffwork, everything still can come to naught. For agendas, like budgets, sometimes aren't followed. Tremendous self discipline and group discipline by Board members are needed if the policy components of a policy focused agenda are in fact to receive the attention they deserve. Here are five aids:

- **Beware of Parkinson's Law.** Historian C. Northcote Parkinson's famous law is that "work expands to fill the time available for its completion." (Closely related is his *Law of Triviality:* the time expended on an agenda item varies inversely with the significance of the item.)[18] Even with a policy focus, most State Board agendas will include many non-policy items. The time allotted to routine items invariably is under pressure for expansion, for these items often are of great intrinsic interest.

There are a number of ways to minimize the effect of Parkinson's Law—some of them outwardly corny. But if your Board is confirming Parkinson, try these techniques: (1) Assign to each routine agenda item, in advance, the number of minutes scheduled for its completion. (2) Appoint a timekeeper who is authorized to interject an announcement whenever the predetermined time allotment is exceeded. (3) If a Board member or faction really wants to go beyond the time allotted for a routine item, require the introduction of a procedural motion which specifies the place from which the extra time is to be taken, if the motion passes. (4) Put the routine items last on the agenda.

- **Meet In A Policy Facilitating Environment.** Remove telephones. Prominently display charts that set forth the Board's major policy goals. Find a place where the press, spectators and consultants can hear and see the proceedings without distracting them. Have a staff person present so that needed materials can be secured without lengthy recesses. Once or twice a year, particularly when metapolicy items are under consideration, meet in isolation at a two- or three-day retreat.

- **Adopt And Adhere To Rules Of Procedure.** Policy items are inherently controversial. Thus the Board must have known and agreed-upon rules to manage debate, and a chairman skilled in applying those rules to assure that debate moves toward resolution.

- **Insist On Good Staffwork.** If the materials needed for informed policy discussions have not been well prepared, or have been distributed too late for prior attention by Board members, postpone the item and perhaps make publicly known the cause of the postponement.
- **Assess Your Work.** Every year a portion of a meeting should be devoted to a review of the previous year's successes and failures in achieving policy advances. (Annual report time provides such an occasion.) Hire a neutral outside "policy making auditor" to spend time reviewing the Board's Minutes, observing its meetings, and providing an outside view of how the Board is performing vis-a-vis policy making. For assessment criteria, use your own statements of Board goals. They provide the standard by which you and the rest of the world judge whether you have achieved, and made good use of, Board agendas that focus on policy.

SECTION III

Action Alternatives

NASBE Staff Recommendations
To State Boards

Many of Dr. Colton's suggestions are good; NASBE adds the following:

- **Once every five years hold hearings or survey a sample of** educators, parents, citizens, legislators, businessmen and students to hear directly from the constituents about what their concerns and priorities are. Compare this input with state education agency (SEA) staff-gathered assessment data and establish five-year goals and objectives.
- **Annually hold a chief/Board/key SEA staff retreat** to set 12- to 24-month Board/SEA priorities and to calendar major agenda events.
- **Use the budget submittal date** or the commencement of the legislative session as the target point toward which a Board agenda cycle works.
- **Adopt a systematic policy development procedure** that identifies key policy development steps and that includes a coherent plan for gathering and using needed information prior to making the policy decision.
- **Set up a Board meeting schedule that allows adequate time** for hearings, Board/staff work sessions, Boards committee work and formal Board sessions.
- **Utilize an agenda planning sheet that allows the chief and Board chairperson to classify the agenda item**—i.e., administrative, budget, policy, judicial, legislative and so on, so that conscious time decisions are made. The planning sheet should also indicate whether it will be an action, discussion, work session, information or hearing item.
- **Consider utilizing a "consent" category on the agenda,** i.e., an item that allows the multigrouping of all non-controversial items for action by a single motion. This technique requires that, should one Board member object to a consent item, that item is removed and considered by the full Board.
- **Exercise discipline in sticking to the plan.** □

SECTION IV

APPENDIX

Footnotes

[1]Decker F. Walker, "Educational Policy is Flapping in the Wind," Center Report (Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, February 1974), p. 21.

[2]Norman D. Kerr, "The School Board as an Agency of Legitimation," *Sociology of Education* 38 (Fall 1964): 34-59. See also Jack Witkowsky, "Education of a School Board Member," *Saturday Review*, (November 10, 1971).

[3]Robert Bendiner, *The Politics of Schools: A Crisis in Self-Government* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

[4]Roald F. Campbell and Tim L. Mazzoni, Jr., eds., *State Policy Making for the Public Schools: A Comparative Analysis* (Columbus: The Ohio State University, 1974) p. 388.

[5]Ibid., pp. 90, 97.

[6]Ibid., p. 6.

[7]Lawrence A. Cremin, ed., *The Republic and the School: Horace Mann on the Education of Free Men* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1957).

[8]National Association of State Boards of Education, *Focus* 11 July 1975 p. 8.

[9]For a good, first-hand account of educational policy making in Washington, see Harry L. Summerfield, *Power and Process: The Formulation and Limits of Federal Educational Policy* (Berkeley: McCutchan, 1974).

[10]For example, see Cyril O. Houle, *The Effective Board* (New York: Association Press, 1969). See also Harold Koontz, *The Board of Directors and Effective Management* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967).

[11]For a recent review, see William L. Boyd, "School Board-Administrative Staff Relationships," in *Understanding School Boards*, ed. Peter J. Cistone (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath, 1975), pp. 103-130.

[12]Courtney C. Brown, *Putting the Corporate Board to Work* (New York: Macmillan, 1976). Also B.S. Cooper, "A Staff for School Boards," *Administrator's Notebook* 21 (1973) No. 3.

[13]National Association of State Boards of Education, *Journal of Proceedings* 1974 Annual Convention, (Denver: 1974), pp. 1-4.

[14]For a review and critique of these reports, see Gordon Cawelti, *Vitalizing the High School* (Washington: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1974).

[15]*The Fleischmann Report on the Quality, Cost, and Financing of Elementary and Secondary Education in New York State*, 3 vols. (New York: Viking, 1973).

[16]For an overview see David T. Tronsgard, Michael J. Grady, Jr., and E. Dean Coon, *Statewide Educational Evaluation* (Denver, National Association of State Boards of Education, 1974).

[17]Charles E. Lindblom, "The Science of Muddling Through," *Public Administration Review* 19 (1950): 79-88.

[18]C. Northcote Parkinson, *Parkinson's Law and Other Studies in Administration* (Cambridge: Houghlon Mifflin, 1957).

Boyd, William L. "School Board-Administrative Staff Relationships." *Understanding School Boards*, ed. Peter J. Cistone. Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath, 1975.

Boyd's chapter is a thoughtful and broadly-based review of the research on board-administration relationships at the school district level. He takes special note of the inherent tension between considerations of democracy and of efficiency.

Brown, Courtney C. *Putting the Corporate Board to Work*. New York: Macmillan, 1976.

Responding to (1) the finding of Mace (see below) and others who have found that governing boards do not govern, and (2) growing public demands for accountable and responsible governing Boards, Brown proposes a re-structuring of the roles and relationships of the Board chairman and the chief executive officer of the organization. The roles should be independent but collaborative. The Board chairman becomes a major figure who has access to resources and who guides the Board's policy making activity. This frees the Board of dependence upon the chief executive. Brown's proposals suggest that state school Boards which are autonomous vis-a-vis the chief state school officer (CSSO) may have greater policy making potential than Boards tied more closely to the CSSO. This book deserves consideration by any state which is re-examining its arrangements for school governance.

Campbell, Roald F. and Tim L. Mazzoni, Jr., eds. *State Policy Making for the Public Schools: A Comparative Analysis*. Columbus: The Ohio State University, 1974.

This monograph incorporates the principal findings of the large scale Educational Governance Project which studied the processes of educational policy formation in twelve states. The project has produced our most comprehensive and up-to-date view of the role of state school boards. A full report is scheduled for publication by McCutchan Publishing Co. in Berkeley. A summary report is available in the *Journal of Proceedings of the 1974 NASBE Convention*, and a more detailed summary is available in Tim L. Mazzoni, Jr. and Roald F. Campbell "Influentials in State Policy Making for the Public Schools," Educational Administration Quarterly 12 (Winter 1976): 1-26.

Dror, Yehezkel. *Public Policy making Reexamined*. Scranton: Chandler Publishing Company, 1968.

Dror develops a critique of the traditional modes of public policy making, and proposes the development of an optimal model which reflects metapolicy knowledge, i.e., knowledge of policies about improving policy making. Not for the general reader, but an important contribution to current efforts to reconsider the processes by which governments make policy.

Mace, Myles L., *Directors: Myth and Reality*. Boston: Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University, 1971.

Using personal observation and interview techniques, Mace studied the actual performance of corporate boards of directors. Despite legal mandates and business rhetoric about the primacy of the policy making functions of boards of directors, Mace found that most corporate directors do *not* establish corporate policies, objectives or strategies. Generally management runs things. Nevertheless, the distribution of powers of control between boards and managers varies

from one company to another, and from one issue to another. Mace does not suggest that corporate boards can or should exercise greater policy making activity. The study provides a provocative basis for comparison for state school boards, particularly in their relations to the state education agency.

Mann, Dale. *Policy Decision Making in Education: An Introduction to Calculation and Control*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1975.

Mann reviews and illustrates the ways in which currently available "decision assisting" techniques can be used for purposes of policy formation and control at both the local and societal levels. Mann carefully notes both the potential and the limitations of the techniques, particularly in light of the inherent complexity—technical and political—of the policy making process. □

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